

IN THE CLAIMS:

22. (Further Amended) A composite material for forming a liquid - retaining layer in a ~~hygiene~~ hygienic article or a medical product, comprising:

a first layer of substantially continuous staple fibers, said fibers having with a diameter of 15 to 35 μm ;

a second film layer; and

a third layer of microfibers, said microfibers having with a diameter of less than 10 μm , said third layer being provided directly on the full surface of the side of said first layer remote from said second film layer by a melt-blown process, said third layer three-dimensionally penetrates the surface structure of said first layer in such a way that the mean spacing D^1 between said third layer and said second film layer is less than the thickness D_{sp} of said first layer which is sandwiched in between.

23. (Previously Pending) The composite material of claim 22, wherein the retention or adhesion force of a hook material relative to the outside of the composite material, formed by said third layer, is less than 20 cN/25 mm.

24. (Previously Pending) The composite material of claim 22, wherein the retention or adhesion force of a hook material relative to the outside of the composite material, formed by said third layer, is less than 10 cN/25 mm.

25. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 22, wherein the retention or adhesion force of a hook material relative to the outside of the composite material, formed by said third layer, is less than 5 cN/25 mm.

26. (Presently Amended)) The composite material of claim 22, ~~characterized in that the~~ wherein said second film layer also penetrates the three - dimensional surface structure of ~~staple fiber~~ said first layer.

27. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 22, wherein the weight per unit of surface area of the composite material is 20 to 45 g/m².

28. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 22, wherein the weight per unit of surface area of the composite material is 25 to 40 g/m².

29. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 22, wherein the weight per unit of surface area of the composite material is 30 to 35 g/m².

30. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 22, wherein the weight per unit of surface area of said third layer is 3 to 10 g/m².

31. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 22, wherein the weight per unit of surface area of said third layer is 4 to 6 g/m².

32. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 22, wherein the weight per unit of surface area of said first layer is 15 to 25 g/m².

33. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 22, wherein the weight per unit of surface area of said first layer is 18 to 22 g/m².

34. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 22, wherein the thickness of said second film layer is 9 to 20 μm.

35. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 22, wherein the thickness of said second film layer is 12 to 17 μm.

36. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 22, wherein the tear

strength of the composite material is at least 15 N/25 mm.

37. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 22, wherein the tear strength of the composite material is at least 18 N/25 mm.

38. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 22, wherein said second film layer is breathable but liquid-proof, so that the composite material is likewise breathable but liquid-proof.

39. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 38, wherein said second film layer is permeable to water vapor through the process of chemisorption.

40. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 38, wherein said second film layer has micropores for admitting water vapor.

41. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 40, wherein said micropores have a diameter of 0.2 to 10 μm .

42. (Previously Presented) The composite material of claim 22, wherein at least said second film layer has macropores in at least some portions.

43. (Presently Amended) The composite material of claim 42, wherein said first and third layers also have macropores, in such a way that said macropores of said first and third layer ~~composite~~ and said macropores of said second film layer form openings that extend through the composite material.

44. (Presently Amended) The use of a composite material of claim 22 as a liquid-retaining layer in a disposable ~~hygiene~~ hygienic article.

45. (Presently Amended)) The use of claim 44, wherein the ~~hygiene~~ hygienic article is one of: a diaper, training pants, a sanitary napkin, a panty liner, and an incontinence

shield.

46. (Previously Presented) The use of claim 44, wherein said composite material is used as a backing sheet.

47. (previously Presented) The use of claim 46, wherein said third layer is disposed on the outside of the backing sheet.